
Subject: St. Catharines GO Station Primary Access - Ridley College
Memorandum of Understanding

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, May 8, 2019

Recommendations

1. That the Chief Administrative Officer **BE AUTHORIZED** to execute a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the commitment by Ridley College, City of St. Catharines, and Niagara Region to create a municipal right-of-way to enable a preferred access road at the St. Catharines GO Station;
2. That a copy of PDS 20-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to the City of St. Catharines; and
3. That all parties **BE NOTIFIED** of Regional Council's decision.

Key Facts

- This report seeks Regional Council to approve the attached Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Ridley College, the City of St. Catharines (City), and Niagara Region (Region) for the City to undertake development of a municipal right-of-way at the St. Catharines GO Station.
- The Region, City, and Ridley College have agreed in principle to a preferred alternate primary station access location further east along Ridley Road beyond the approved 2011 ESR station area boundary, which Metrolinx also supports.
- This agreement facilitates establishing the municipal right-of-way as a component of the enabling capital work improvements to prepare for and accommodate improved Station access for GO Rail service at the St. Catharines site.
- The MOU will result in Ridley College submitting a draft plan of subdivision to create a new municipal right-of-way.
- Ridley College Board of Governors will consider the MOU on May 4, 2019, an update on Ridley College decision will be provided on May 8, 2019.

Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval of the MOU. Regional Council already pre-emptively exempted Ridley College from the Regional

planning fees associated with a Draft Plan of Subdivision application in the amount of \$10,000 through PDS 36-2018.

Analysis

Along with Metrolinx and Ridley College, the Region and City have explored means to accommodating all of the required GO Station elements within the approved 2011 ESR station area boundary. Consensus has been achieved on preferred locations of nearly all functional design elements with exception to the location of a primary station access along Ridley Road (Appendix I).

Upon review of Metrolinx's Functional Station Design for St. Catharines, the Region, City, and Ridley College agree the alignment of station access approved in the 2011 ESR is not preferred by any party, and that a primary station access is further east along Ridley Road (approximately midpoint between Louth Street and Ambrose Street) would serve the station, the development and the community much better.

However, because this preferred location is beyond the approved 2011 ESR station area boundary, this alternative preferred primary station access will require Ridley College to dedicate a municipal right-of-way to the City through a *Planning Act* application. The Region, City, and Ridley College have agreed that a Plan of Subdivision is the most efficient means to dedicate a municipal right-of-way to achieve the preferred primary station access.

The recommendation of creating a municipal right-of-way is preferred as it provides the City of St. Catharines the opportunity to ensure that the street is developed in a way that is consistent with the vision of the Secondary Plan including improved pedestrian and cyclist connectivity. The Metrolinx driveway was proposed to hook west and then north creating an indirect path from the station to Ridley Road. The alignment was not preferred from a connectivity perspective or for efficient future use of the urban land for development. St. Catharines has limited, vacant land available for development especially adjacent to the GO Station and it is in the City's best interest to maximize the development potential of the adjacent lands as it will lead to future tax assessment and additional commercial and residential development to meet the needs of residents. The proposed public road will also allow for appropriate development of the vacant parcel in the future in a manner that implements the vision of the Secondary Plan. The proposed Metrolinx driveway would not contribute to the orderly development of this important parcel of land.

The MOU outlines the Region's, City's, and Ridley College's respective roles in facilitating the new municipal road. Matters described in the MOU include:

- preparation and review of the Plan of Subdivision application;

- design, configuration, and construction of the new municipal road, the new municipal road intersection with Ridley Road, and improvements to Ridley Road; and
- approximate timelines and phasing associated to the new municipal road and nearby capital work projects (2019-2022).

With the arrival of daily GO Train service to the St. Catharines Station effective January 7, 2019, the realization of significant socio-economic benefits, as detailed within Niagara Region's 2015 GO Business Case, are evident. Some expected benefits of GO Rail Service in Niagara include:

- Improved goods movement and reduced QEW congestion by a lessened volume vehicles travelling to and from Niagara;
- Enhanced access and connections to intra- and inter-municipal transit services;
- Strengthened ability to attract skilled-trade workers living in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) to Niagara's skilled-trade employers;
- Increased exposure of Niagara's tourism assets to the GTHA market area; and
- Improved access to public and institutional facilities (i.e. healthcare and post-secondary) for residents, students, visitors, and staff.

In order to realize the maximum potential economic benefit of the arrival and enhancement of daily GO Train service at St. Catharines, there is a need to invest in capital works improvements around the station areas. The Region has approved budget of \$2.25 million for a preliminary design, environmental assessment study, and detailed design of the CN Bridge Replacement. The Region has included \$12 million in the capital budget forecast for construction costs associated with the bridge replacement in future years. There will also be future long-term investments in the reconstruction of Louth Street, including the intersection at Louth and Ridley Road.

It is anticipated that the investments in improving local infrastructure will lead to significant economic benefits locally and regionally. As an example, the land value around the three stations is estimated to produce over \$50 million in uplift to the local economy, as outlined in the Region's 2015 Business Case.

Alternatives Reviewed

If the municipal road is not established through a *Planning Act* application, in order to undertake construction of the station access approved in the 2011 ESR, Metrolinx would locate the access in an undesired location further west along Ridley Road. Impacts of this would include jeopardizing future development potential of lands adjacent to the transit station, limiting the potential for Transit Oriented Development on the site, inhibiting the parcel's frontage on Louth Street, as well as add increased traffic pressures for queuing at the intersection of Louth Street and Ridley Road. Additionally,

if Metrolinx were to construct the access as laid out in the 2011 approved ESR, it would only serve as station access; a defacto driveway that could not support access to adjacent development parcels.

Alternatively if a Plan of Subdivision were not pursued, the Region could undertake a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment to establish a new right-of-way. This is not recommended, as the EA process would bear more cost to the Region, and would likely produce the same outcome as the Plan of Subdivision.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This request supports Regional Council's strategic priorities of moving people and goods; and, doing business differently.

Other Pertinent Reports

- PDS 36-2018: Request to exempt Draft Plan of Subdivision Regional Review fees – Ridley College – St. Catharines GO Transit Station

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Appendices